



TRIBAL MOVEMENTS IN WAYANAD; SOME HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

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Tribes are the real inhabitants of the land. Tribal communities are found in all districts of Kerala, except Alappuzha. Wayanad has the largest tribal population among all the other districts of Kerala state and is considered as the 'Holy land' of 'Adivasis'. The tribal population is spread in the three taluks of Wayanad, consisting of the eight Panchayaths in Mananthavady, seven Panchayaths in Sultan Bathery and ten Panchayaths in Vaythiri taluk. The Paniyas, Adiyas, Mullukurumas, Tenkurumas, Kattunaykas, Uralikurumas, Kurichyas, Kallanadies, Kunduvadiyans, Karimbals, Thachinadans are the chief communities in Wayanad.

Outbreak of Tribal Movements

The root cause of all the problems have been suffered by the tribal people was in connection with their landlessness. For more than six decades, The Adivasi movements have been demanding to get back their alienated land. Even though laws were enacted to reinstate the Adivasi land in 1975 it was not successfully implemented due to many untold reasons. The above said Acts was cancelled in 1997 and a new Act was enacted. The new Act cast aside the earlier point of view of reinstating the alienated land.

As per the new Act, land and houses should be given to the Adivasis instead of their alienated land. The Dalit organizations came forward to protest against the new Act. They demanded five acres of land for agriculture instead of their alienated land.

As observed above, the root cause of the problems of Adivasis in Kerala, especially in Wayanad is their landlessness. There were mainly three reasons observed for the said alienation of their land.

1. Encroachment and immigration:-

The immigration was started in to the Adivasi land or forest land in the 1940's mainly in the form of bare encroachments and migration as social mobilization process. These encroachment and immigration was prevalent in the Adivasi land holdings. The chief segment of Adivasis lost their lands for repayment their debt or to meet their household necessities or for the medical treatment.

Those who had vested interests subjugated the forest for industrial purpose and their migration extended in to the forest lands in Wayanad wherein the tribal communities actually lived. To them, the forest was considered as a source of income and livelihood. The British possessed the tribal inhabiting regions where they developed their plantations.

2. The use of forest for other purposes:-

The development of technology and the increasing need of lives depended up on forest for non-forest purposes. Industrial and technological growth has become possible by the maximum use of natural resources. This greatly affected the life and social compactness of the tribal people. The use of forest for non-forest purposes destroyed the habitat of the tribal people here.

3. Historical reasons:-

The newly introduced global policies and its politics brought up changes that discarded the relation and made a profound and wide gap between the civilized and tribals. As K. Panoor wrote that the alienated land of the Adivasis around 25%. Apart from the migration, many land Acts also caused to the landlessness of Adivasis. When the English East India Company established their authority over the forests in Malabar and established their right to cut down the trees, the natives began to protest against their activities.

Cheengery Agitation:-

The Adivasi leaders declared that they would take possession of Cheengery after Ambukuthi on 26th January 1995. A campaign was organized under the banner of Adivasi United Samithi. As the part of resource mobilization, a handful of rice was collected from each of the Adivasi families by the agitators through Oorukootams. The land Cheengeri was bought by Kerala Government from the Government of Tamil Nadu. These 528 acres of land would be distributed among 100 families; each family would get five acres of land. The Adivasis

needed to be trained how to use this land productively. As per the documents fifty five lakh rupees was spent for Adivasis to train scientific cultivation during the period 1957-1995. But they were not given even a bit of land for cultivation.

On January 25th night, Adivasis entered the Cheengery Estate and 249 families built huts and stayed there. As a result, 120 Adivasi leaders were taken under the custody of Kalpetta police. The District collector reached at the struggle site and negotiated with the leaders. After seven days of judicial custody the accused were released. On February 7th 224 Adivasis were arrested and they were sent to the sub- jail at Kozhikode. They were released after 11 days imprisonment. Meanwhile the government made cable fence around the Cheengery estate. Against this action of the Government the Adivasi Samithi declared a relay sathyagraha strike in protest against the inhuman treatment of the Government towards Adivasis and this strike lasted for 48 days. There was political intervention on Cheengery land problem and the CPI (M) Wayanad district committee declared that the Land Restoration Act should never be implemented in its exact form. But on 14th February the CPI(M) state Secretary E.K. Nayyar visited Cheengery estate and appealed the government to hand over the estate to Adivasis.

Paanavally Agitation

On 5th March 1995 the Adivasi Pravarthaka Samithi marched to Panavally forest land. In Panavally 18 acres of land was supposed to be declared as reserve forest in the near future. The Samithi built huts in the land and seventy five Adivasi families started farming there. On 10th March 1995 the forest officials destroyed the huts and the Adivasis were arrested. Later they were released but they rebuilt the demolished huts. But the police set fire on the huts and 102 Adivasis again were arrested and sent them to the judicial custody include children below the age of five. After the release of the accused they once again moved to Panavally and constructed new huts and indulged in farming.

A meeting of the Adivasi Samithi meeting held at Kalpetta on 26th January 1994 decided to start agitation against the Government and to take possession of the land deserved by the Adivasis. The meeting declared March 1st as deadline to the Government. On the scheduled date, Adivasi agitators surrounded before the District Collector of Wayanad. This strange stands of the Adivasi Samithi caused to detach from the mainstream political parties. Meanwhile the Government appealed the High Court for a grace period of one year to solve the Adivasi land problem.

Government further informed the Court that the non-co-operation of Adivasi Samithi was the reason for not implementing the law. But the High Court rejected the argument of the Government. The High Court disagreed to prolong the time period to the government to implement the Act. The Court once again asserted its previous verdict that the land would be given to the Adivasis within 6 months and the Court would observe whether the revenue department carries out the order of the Court. The Government did not take favorable decision even if the frequent intervention of the Court and the endless demand of the Adivasi agitations. There was no other means for the Adivasis except to continue the struggle. On 26th February 1995, an 'Until Death Sathyagraha' was started in front of the Secretariat under the eminent leadership of C.K. Janu. This fast lasted for 13 days and the agitators attempted to enter the Secretariat Block at the last phase of the struggle. The Secretariat guards prevented the attempt of the agitators and C.K. Janu and others were wounded and taken to hospital.

There was no other way before the Adivasis to obtain and realize their rights; therefore they were compelled to move to the crucial form of struggle. C.K. Janu and the other agitators started making huts in front of the Secretariat as the part of the struggle and continued the agitation. On September 2001 the agitators made traditional huts with the help of Gothra Maha Sabha. They prepared food at the huts and stayed there. This agitation attracted the mass support of general public. This agitation lasted for nearly one month. The A possibility of compromise with the intervention of famous political leader K.R. Gouri Amma and eminent poet Sugathakumari emerged and the agitation was put to an end on October 16th 2001 and an official meeting was convened by the then Chief minister A.K.

Antony The Government declared that, according to the availability of land, each landless Adivasi family would be given 3 to 5 acres of land. The Government considered the demands of the agitators. The allotment of land would commence in January 2002 and supposed to be completed in December. On 1st January 2002 the then Chief Minister A. K. Antony inaugurated the distribution of Adivasi land at Marayoor. But the promise of the Government was yet not accomplished and the waiting was absolutely futile. The attitude of Government forced the Adivasis to take up to aggressive struggle like Muthanga agitation.

The Muthanga Agitation

At the end of the endless waiting for land the Adivasis started the a Sabha of Adivasis. The Muthanga struggle was a reaction to the subversion Muthanga struggle against the negative attitude of the Government. They made temporary huts in the struggle site of Muthanga on 3rd January 2003 and they proclaimed that the Muthanga is an autonomous region under the discrimination of Gothra Mahof the agreement signed by the government of Kerala with Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha in 2001.

The Adivasis made huts Wild in Muthanga struggle site which is situated in Nilagiri Biosphere Reserve and adjacent to Muthanga Life Sanctuary in the Western Ghats where the forest was already devastated. Adivasi leaders opine that the signing of the land distribution agreement between the then Chief Minister A.K.Antony and Gothra Mahasabha was not meaningfully implemented and the government had no interest to implement the agreement.

P.K.Prakash rightly observes that Chief Minister A.K.Antony was not a person supporting the Adivasi interests. On the other hand when he was Chief Minister of Kerala for the first time he decided to provide 'Pattayam' to those who encroached the forests and Adivasi land. Along with this, most of the small pieces of land of the Adivasis were taken away by the trespassers. At that time A.K. Antony did not take interest to restore the alienated land of the Adivasis and distribute it to them as per the Act. In short, A.K.Antony did not take any step to implement the Adivasi Land Act of 1975. Besides the Antony Government declared to distribute land to the landless Adivasi families without having details of landless Adivasi families, and the needed quantity of available land to distribute under the government. Even though Adivasis were given land at Marayoor and Kumdala but they could not enter their land due to the objection of forest department and lack of rehabilitation facilities. Every where the forest department has an arrogant approach towards tribal land issues. Once at Marayoor, they appeared to oppose the land distribution programme of the Government itself, therefore it collapsed. They always show pleasure to clash with the Gothramahasabha. The Tribal court of Gothra Maha Sabha started on August 25th 2002 and commenced the agitation campaign which way for grew in to Muthanga and the symbolic autonomous rule at Muthanga

Adivasis started the struggle on 3rd January 2003 at Muthanga. The tribal people protested that attempt of the forest department to remove trees from the forest through clear felling. They also defended the department of their breach of the existing forest Act by themselves whom entrusted to conserve the same as genuine obligation. Some tribal men lost their lives amidst the struggle to sustain the dense forest. Above all, the forest department was interested to convert the area into a Zoological park and a tourist spot in spite of Muthanga being declared a wild life sanctuary. The Muthanga struggle and the GIM in Kerala were happening simultaneously. If the Government tried to expel the Adivasis from the land and huts that might be led in too many political problems. So the Government hesitated to take any strong action against the Muthanga Struggle at the initial stage. The Adivasi agreement that assured to give land to landless Adivasi families was undermined by the government. The tribal court decided to claim their rights over the forest resources. For the realization of the above said goals the tribal court decided to start agitation all over Kerala. The tribal court sitting was attended by around 2000 Adivasis. In the court session details about 18000 acre lands to be restored were submitted. The second phase of struggle started in Muthanga on the basis of the 4th part of the agreement between the Adivasis and the government. The fourth part of the agreement signed by A.K. Antony with the Adivasi leaders to terminate the refugee camp which cited as "The State Government will request to the Central Government to declare the land possessed by the Adivasis at present and the land newly distributed to them as scheduled areas." The State Government will make legislation to protect the land and culture of the Adivasis living in these scheduled areas. The Gothra autonomy was the most important benevolence to the Adivasis in the agreement signed with the Government.

The Adivasi Gothramahasabha a great assembly of Adivasi Communities comprised of 380 representatives from 31 different Adivasi communities from the Kerala actively participated in the struggle. It also serves as a platform for all Adivasi organizations of Kerala. The Adivasi Gothramahasabha had already given prior notice to the government about the struggle at Muthanga. But the Government ignored it at the initial stage and later the state intervened with the brutal force on the 45th day of the struggle. The Muthanga agitation was brutally suppressed by the police resulting in the death of an Adivasi and a policeman and hundreds of Adivasis were severely wounded

The Kerala Government sent a report to the National Human Rights Commission about the Muthanga Agitation. The report says, "A group of 500 Adivasis under

the banner of Adivasi Gothramahasabha led by C.K.Janu and M. Geethanandan entered in to the (encroached) block I and II plantations in Noolpuzha Village at Muthanga range on 5-1-2003, and they declared that the area is autonomous of Adivasis. The Adivasis came from different parts of Waynad and from other districts of Kerala named the place 'Adivasi Gothramahasabha Panchayath'. They arranged Check posts at Thakarapadi, Ponkudi and Ambukuthi and an entrance fee levied to the non-tribe to enter in to the area. Even the forest officials were not exempted from it.

The Left Democratic Front stated during the election campaign that if they came to power in the election, the Government would provide land to all landless Adivasis and all judicial charges against the Adivasis and would be canceled and would make a rehabilitation package for them. But in fact, they comfortably took all that promises. The Left Government really upset down the Forests Rights Act 2006 of the Adivasis. C.K.Janu says that the circular issued by the Left Government in 2008 was against the interest of Adivasis. In 2008, the Government declared that land will be given to those who do not possess even a small piece of land their own. This tactics of the Left Government is entirely against the Adivasis who possess only one or two cent. The Muthanga struggle brought up the Adivasi land issue in to a new perspective. A.K.Antony's promise, that each Adivasi family would be given five acres of land had not been carried out. This fault of the Antony Ministry paved way for the struggle Muthanga.

Muthanga event was a test dose to examine the role and responsibility of the governments. In Kerala either UDF or LDF developed an anti-Adivasi attitude while they prepare their political manifesto. The root of Adivasi land issue is laid down along with the process of socio-economic changes during the last two centuries. The Adivasis in Kerala fall in to different categories and follow different cultural decent. While some cultivate, others gathered forest produces while some others make handicrafts for their livelihood. It may be said that the origin of the problems of Dalit of present day is the incomplete land reforms.

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